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Museum of Fine Arts Boston

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE TEXTILE SOCIETY OF AMERICA

Summary Report by the President

Milton Sondag

After The Textile Museum decided to discontinue its Irene Emery Roundtables and the Centre International d'Etude des Textiles Anciens finally admitted it was not interested in an American branch, it became clear that an independent American group of textile enthusiasts should be formed to satisfy the many requests for such an organization. There had been an attempt to form a group which was called WHATS, but it never got off the ground. Peggy Gilfoy at the Indianapolis Museum of Art, one of the original organizers, was left guarding its small fund when it folded.

On April 3, 1987 a small group met in the Textile Department of the Museum of Fine Arts Boston. They were: Mattiebelle Gittinger, Dale Gluckman, Louise Mackie, Milton Sondag, Lotus Stack, Christa Thurman, Jean-Michel Tuchscherer and Ann Wardwell. We decided to be the founders of what we agreed should be named the Textile Society of America. The gathering should have included Rita Adrosko, John Vollmer and Peggy Gilfoy and they were immediately phoned and asked to join. We chose officers and board members with no authority, armed only with the conviction that if an organization were to grow, this was the only way to do it.

Peggy Gilfoy was named President and John Vollmer Vice-President. An administrative structure was established and Lotus Stack volunteered to host the first symposium in Minneapolis in September 1988. John Vollmer agreed to organize the program following the theme "Textiles as Primary Sources." From the very beginning we wanted TSA to represent as broad a range of interests in textiles as possible. Membership was to be open to anyone who paid annual dues. Although not specifically stated, costumes and "Eastern" rugs were not to be emphasized and the cutoff date for fabrics to be discussed might be 1950.

The symposium in Minneapolis was a huge success. John Vollmer supervised the publication of papers and with the help of Suzanne Baizerman the publication was sent to participants within four months of the September meeting.

In Minneapolis in 1988 there was an election of officers. Peggy Gilfoy was to be President and Milton Sondag Vice-President. Mary Jane Leland became the Treasurer, Marianne Carlano the Recording Secretary, Suzanne Baizerman the Corresponding Secretary and Beverly Gordon the Membership Chairperson. The original founders were kept on as board members, each given a task as seemed appropriate. Elizabeth Barber, Susan Bean, Clarita Anderson, Arlene Cooper, Mary Landis and Mokhtar El-Homossani were asked to join to broaden the range of professional interests. Clarita and Arlene volunteered to produce the organization's *Newsletter*.

Shortly following the Minneapolis symposium Peggy Gilfoy died leaving Milton Sunday as President. The publication "Textiles as Primary Sources" was dedicated to Peggy. Lotus Stack became Vice-President.

A few adjustments in the duties of various officers and the structure of TSA have evolved and changed in the past two years with the guidance and approval of the Board. The TSA Board has been meeting regularly and editions of the *Newsletter* have been produced and mailed.

Our biggest problem in the past two years was the membership list. We apologize for any misunderstandings which might have occurred as the result of a confused list. When Peggy Gilfoy died her briefcase containing TSA files could not be found. A membership list was reconstructed based largely on records kept by the Indianapolis Museum of Art which had been acting as our bank under Peggy's direction. Before the meeting in Minneapolis TSA was a one person operation. Finally, after several *Newsletter* mailings and a membership renewal, a reliable list of members emerged. But this highlighted the next issue: it was very difficult to have a membership person in Wisconsin, a newsletter publisher in Maryland, a Treasurer in Los Angeles and a bank in a fourth state. The solution at the moment is that Mary Jane Leland is Treasurer as well as Membership Chairperson. Since Peggy's death the Minneapolis Institute of Art has been acting as our bank under the watchful eye of Lotus Stack.

TSA was incorporated in May of this year. Our lawyer is J. Benjamin Ahrens in Minneapolis. We are incorporated in Minnesota, but this does not in any way restrict our activities nation-wide. We are applying for tax exemption, working on a final draft of the bylaws and about to open our own bank account.

Since TSA is only now beginning to function smoothly, I recommended that the officers and board be reelected, as it were, for another term and that we hold a formal election with proper nomination of officers at the General Meeting in 1992. A vote was taken which supported this suggestion.

The purpose of TSA is to provide an interdisciplinary forum for the exchange and dissemination of information on textiles in their cultural, socioeconomic, artistic and technical contexts. Activities are to reflect the diversity of our membership which we encourage to include as many aspects of textiles as possible. There are no qualifications for membership. We will hold a symposium on even numbered years and publish a newsletter on a regular schedule. Other activities will be planned as we can manage them or as you suggest them. We are supporting the *Network* originated by Susan Bean. Plans are underway for the symposium in 1992 and an alternate year activity. But, the bottom line is this: TSA will only be as good as you make it.

We are fortunate to have had the cooperation of a number of dedicated hard working individuals and a body of members who are enthusiastic about the goals of the Society. Thank you each and everyone of you for our support.